

BOOK REVIEWS

Fundamental Questions in Aesthetics. P. C. Chatterji, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Simla, Pp. 202. Price: Rs. 20. 1968.

Mr. Chatterji doubts 'whether the discipline of aesthetics has advanced very much as a result of the work of the modern philosophers of beauty and suggests that we should go back to the more healthy and vigorous tradition "which can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle, in which aesthetic theory kept much closer to the facts and was concerned with raising specific questions about the interpretation and evaluation of particular art-forms." And, further, "...neither Plato nor Aristotle tried to lay down a definition of art." From this point of view Mr. Chatterji, has examined representative modern aestheticians like Langer, Collingwood, Croce, Richards, Stevenson, Hare and other. While agreeing that "little purpose is served by speculative aesthetic theories such as those of Hegel" he goes on to say that "there is no empirical fact about a work of art which excludes the possibility of a definition of works of art." But since "there are no kinds of value or species of value which we designate as aesthetic value, moral value and so on", it would be fruitless to try to give a definition of beauty as such. Despite this, beauty does not reduce itself to a chimera. For specific classes of objects which we designate as beautiful there are specific criteria. But that is not all. We can also have some generic criteria for all classes of objects which we call beautiful. Mr. Chatterji warns us that in our search for a philosophy of beauty we must not jettison our commonsense and fidelity to empirical facts. Empirically we find certain things beautiful and call certain works of men works of art. But to think that there is beauty over and above the empirical data presented to us and to profound general theories of art and beauty as Kant and Hegel did is to hypostatize the abstract. And to think that there is nothing called the beautiful, all statements about the beautiful are nothing but expressions of our likings, approval, etc. is to go against common-sense. Mr. Chatterji recommends that we should try to steer clear of the sylla of idealistic metaphysics and the charybdis of neo-positivistic nihilism. In this regard his effort is reminiscent of G. E. Moore's endeavour to bring philosophy down to earth. The reader may find that like Moore's common-

sense and empiricism, Mr. Chatterji's common-sense and empiricism are also very uncommon and supra-empirical.

However, Mr. Chatterji tries to give us some criteria for distinguishing works of art from other objects. "There are criteria which are applicable to works of art generally or at least to most works of art . . . (And) within particular arts or groups, there are some additional criteria which apply." While naming some of the generic qualities Mr. Chatterji writes: "order, simplicity, compactness, etc., are aesthetic qualities and . . . there cannot be a work of art which does not exhibit at least one of these qualities." And he confesses that "the presence of any single quality is not itself a guarantee of aesthetic merit." One may go a bit further and ask whether the presence of all the qualities — order, simplicity and compactness — would alone make a thing beautiful. Moreover, the author does not tell us why he regards such qualities as aesthetic qualities or under what conditions they become aesthetic qualities. Possibly his answer would be again an appeal to commonsense and empiricism. We shall, then, be not too far from a computerised theory of beauty. But, we are afraid, neither Plato and Aristotle nor Mr. Chatterji would suggest that. For, at the end of the book he writes about "a metaphysic" expressed in poetry.

Taking about the specific criteria the author confines himself to the criteria for evaluating poetry. Among the criteria for evaluating poetry he discusses specially only one. "The value of literary works will . . . be determined not only by the manner in which assertions are made but also by what it is that is asserted. Our evaluation of literary works will be affected by the truth or falsity, the importance or triviality of what they say." But poets should not be judged by a truth table. It is not reasonable to ask: "Is this view true, if we expect the answer to take the form of a simple yes or no. On the other hand it would be more reasonable to ask the question: how true is this poet's philosophy or how far does it go? The answer could not be given in any precise terms. But broadly it would involve a comparison with other views and an assessment of the poet's grasp of some basic pattern of experience."

The reader may say that all this is acceptable to him as useful guidelines for determining the aesthetic quality of a work of art; but do they constitute a theory of aesthetics? Mr. Chatterji has given us some criteria to distinguish a work of art from other objects. Doubtless the criteria and the thing which is to be distinguished by the application of the criteria, criss-cross; so do the authors criteria of art and his "definition of a work of art." Possibly he will maintain that the job of aesthetics is to tell us the criteria which we implicitly or explicitly apply when we call a thing beautiful. The reader may disagree with the criteria provided by Mr. Chatterji for distinguishing a work of art from other objects; but he will have to take the

book seriously as, indeed, the problems raised in it are serious. The book deserves careful reading.

—M. K. Haldar

Hindu-Javanese Musical Instruments, by Jaap Kunst. Revised English Edition. (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1968). pp. xii + 156, 121 figures (photographs and sketches).

What is known as Greater India comprises various areas of Central and South Eastern Asia. This colonization must have started in the period just before the commencement of the Christian era. As for the South Eastern Asian regions, Java and Sumatra were known during the age of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*; modern Kedah is mentioned as the port of Kataha. Even Ptolemy talks of the *Yavadwipa* (Java). Borneo had come under Indian influence by the 4th Cent. A.D.; and Fa Hien, the Chinese pilgrim was in India during the first decade of 5th Cent. and returned to his native land via Java where he found Brahminism flourishing. Indian colonists settled in the coastal areas of Indonesia and traded at ports such as Tamralipti (Kalinga) and Nagapattinam (Tamil Nadu). Indian influence declined during the 3rd and 4th Cent. but gained ground under the great maritime rulers of Sailendras. By the end of 15th Cent. Hindu and Buddhist trends were gradually superseded by Islamic thought.

With the Indian invaders and traders went their art and culture — including the caste system. They took with them *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and other ancient lores of the mother country. Borobodour (8-9th Cent.) and Angkor Wat (9th Cent.) are some of the finest examples of Indian-inspired architecture and sculpture. Music from India was also taken along by these people and for a long time was a basic component of Indonesian music. Both literary references and sculptural representations bear testimony to this fact.

The book under review deals with the pre-Islamic period of Javanese History. The earliest sculptural reference is from the Candis Sari reliefs — c. 750 A.D.; the oldest textual and epigraphic source are of 821 A.D. and the latest is of the end of 15th Cent.; a period covering the later Hindu and Buddhist times.

Chapter 2 deals with chordophones (*tata vadya*), comprising harps, lutes, bar-zithers (finger board instruments), *celmpung* and *guntang*. Of the harps, the *makara* (*makara yazh*), and *vipanchi* are of particular interest; for the former is one of the oldest Tamil instruments and the latter an ancient Aryan one. What is of greater significance is the case of *ravana-hata*. While it is now a bowed instrument in India, it is taken to be lute in Java — by Kunst. He even suggests that it might have been a plucked

instrument at some early stage. Indeed, there is no reference or description of any bowed instrument at all!

In Chapter 3 are studied aerophones (*sushira vadya*) — flutes, glottophones and trumpets. Of the flutes, the horizontal one — *ti wang* — is of interest; probably, *wang* is related to *wangsi* (Skt. *vamsi*). While in Java glottophones are extinct, in Borneo they are known as *kedire*, *keluri* and so on. There is a description of rice stalk aerophones. Among the trumpets there are discussions of the conch (*sangka*=*sankh*), *turya* (*turahi*) and *kahala*. There is a paragraph on *sondari*, an Aeolian flute.

Membranophones are described in Chapter 4. Of these there are *padahi* (*pataha*?), *muraba* (*muraja*?) *mrdangga* and *mardala*. These names are too familiar to us for further discussions. However, of special interest to organologists is the discussion on the naming of drums. This should be an eye-opener to our musicologists who would rather rely on their fancies than facts; it is a fine essay of meticulous care in research.

Idiophones form the subject matter of Chapter 5 and, as may be expected, this is the largest one in the book; for Javanese music has developed mainly on the lines of scales produced by such instruments. The descriptions cover scrapers, goblet-shaped cymbals, *kakhara* tops, bells without clappers, *kulkuls* (slit drums), *taluktak* (water-clatterer), various components of *gamelans*, and gongs. What is curious is the name *bheri* which is a drum in India but a gong in Indonesia.

The next Chapter gives a list of unidentified names of instruments and orchestras, followed by Tables of Javanese and Balinese manuscripts (chronological and alphabetical) and a chronological list of preserved instruments.

The information given in the book is a careful collection of facts showing the ancient cultural ties of India and the Indonesian islands. But there is a surprising aspect: as one scans the names of the instruments, one finds only the Indo-Aryan, but no Dravidian ones at all — unless *makara* is an abridged word of *makara yazh* (Even here only *yazh* is Dravidian); yet Java had close political, mercantile and cultural relations with South India!

A very informative book, revealing the admirable acuity of the author's mind. A fine guideline for Indian organologists.

—B. C. Deva